

Roberto Alonzo

Biography

Roberto R. Alonzo is currently serving his sixth term as a Texas State Representative in the 81st Texas Legislature (2009-2011) having been elected in November 1992 and started his first term during the 73rd Regular Session in 1993. In January 2011, he will be starting his seventh term during the 82nd Legislature, as he was reelected in the March 2010 primaries. He has also served during the 74th (1995), 78th (2003), 79th (2005) and 80th Regular Sessions (2007). State Rep. Alonzo serves House District 104 in the Legislature, which is in southwest Dallas including primarily the communities of Oak Cliff, Cockrell Hill, northeast Grand Prairie, North Oak Cliff, and Arcadia Park. When he was first elected, Rep. Alonzo made history by becoming the first Mexican American from North Texas elected to the Legislature, outdistancing his opponent by a 2 to 1 margin with over 66% percent of the vote. Making history is nothing new to Rep. Alonzo. In 1978, as a college student, Rep. Alonzo became the first Hispanic elected President of the Student Government at the University of Texas at Austin. The Austin campus today enrolls over 50,000 students in its 16 colleges and universities.

On July 7, 1993, Rep. Alonzo once again made Texas history when Governor Ann Richards signed HB 1261 into law - the first piece of legislation authored by the Dallas freshman representative, creating the Texas Partnership and Scholarship Program (TPSP). Gov. Richards' signature of HB 1261 at the time made the TPSP the first program of its kind in the country modeled after the "I Have A Dream" Foundation of New York to be attempted on a statewide scale. The TPSP is a cooperative partnership effort between business, schools, and communities working together to provide mentoring/counseling programs and college scholarships for financially-needy students.

Education has consistently been one of Rep. Alonzo's legislative priorities. In addition to HB 1261, in 1993, he authored HB 982 which provided over \$8.2 million in scholarship monies from already-existing sources to financially-needy students attending college in Texas. During the 1993 session, as a member of the House Urban Affairs Committee, Rep. Alonzo worked closely with other legislators to pass one of the most significant packages of gang-related legislation ever passed in Texas to combat crime problems among our state's teens and youth. During his first 2 terms, he also served on the House Transportation Committee, working on a number of important legislative measures that impacted positively the State's transportation system, including improvements to our roads, highways, and interstate thoroughfares. Rep. Alonzo currently (2009-2011) serves on the House Committees on Higher Education and Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence. During the 2009 interim, he was also appointed by House Speaker Joe Straus to serve on the Texas Judicial Council, the Indigent Defense Task Force, as well as the Select Committee on Transportation Funding. Additionally, he currently serves (2010) as Chairman of the International Relations, Trade & Immigration Task Force of the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL), to which he was appointed by Illinois State Senator Iris Y. Martinez who serves as the current NHCSL President (2010).

Other committees that Rep. Alonzo has served on during his legislative career have included House Judicial Affairs and Corrections, in 1995 and 2003, respectively. In previous sessions, he has also served on the Border & International Affairs and Judiciary Committees.

Among the legislative highlights for Rep. Alonzo during the 78th Regular Session in 2003 was to secure funding to set up the Alonzo Bilingual/ESL Education Scholars Program at the University of North Texas (UNT) to provide tuition assistance and loan forgiveness as incentives for students to pursue bilingual education teaching certification. The program was extended for 2 more years during the 81st Session in 2009. Moreover, during the 80th Session in 2007, the scholarship program was

granted extension for 2 additional years as Rep. Alonzo worked with members of the House Appropriations Committee to secure continued funding. To date, the program has provided close to \$1 million in scholarship assistance to college students pursuing degrees in bilingual education teacher certification. In 2003, State Rep. Alonzo worked closely with House Appropriations Committee Chairman - State Rep. Jim Pitts of Waxahachie - to secure much-needed textbook funding for third and fifth grade children enrolled in ESL classes, as well as up to a million dollars appropriations for small urban hospitals to provide community care. One of the most debated and controversial issues of the 78th regular session involved ethics reform, particularly campaign finance disclosure rules. To help address the issue, Rep. Alonzo was able to add one of his own pieces of legislation to the ethics bill that allows an individual to file for injunctive relief against a political candidate who failed to file a campaign finance report. Current law only provides for civil penalties if someone does not file a campaign finance report. With his successful amendment, Rep. Alonzo provided a new method for individuals to make political candidates follow the law, and thus address the much discussed ethics reform issue. Furthermore, Rep. Alonzo worked closely with former Rep. Steve Wolens of Dallas on much of the important ethics legislation that he amended.

Yet another one of Rep. Alonzos proudest accomplishments in 2003 was passing legislation that directs all junior college governing boards in the state to determine the need for and demand a program and/or course work in Mexican-American Studies. Working closely with Rep. Fred Hill of Richardson, as well as with officials and students from Richland College, a branch of the Dallas County Community College District, Rep. Alonzo offered legislation which permits Richland College to become the first junior college level institution in Texas to offer such a program. With such a thriving Hispanic community in the Dallas metroplex area and in Texas, Rep. Alonzo made it a priority to ensure that educational opportunities exist for all students to be able to study the history and culture of this vital ethnic group in the state.

Additionally, Rep. Alonzo wanted to ensure that diversity will be a valued goal at both the local and state government levels. Thus, he amended and helped successfully pass legislation to ensure that appointments to local governing bodies are representative of their constituencies. In addition, he helped pass a comparable measure so that all appointments to statewide governing bodies reflect the racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the state. Rep. Alonzo worked closely with key legislators on this important affirmative action legislation, namely State Rep. Warren Chisum of Pampa and State Rep. Pete Gallego of Alpine . Finally, he fought to keep the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) from repealing a section of law that encourages the use of disadvantaged businesses, such as those with minority ownership, in contract bidding.

In a legislative session in which many different communities were under constant attack, Rep. Alonzo in 2003 succeeded in passing two important measures to aid the disabled and underserved populations living in Texas. As part of the reorganization of the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners (TBAE), some legislators sought to remove protections set up by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 for building requirements. Rep. Alonzo persuaded them to maintain the full effect of this federal act as part of state law, protecting disabled persons from future limitations to their public access. Many hospitals have faced exorbitant high costs as many individuals usually receive the most expensive form of medical care in an emergency room after they are seriously ill, rather than take the necessary precautionary preventive measures early if they only had adequate and affordable health care coverage, to begin with. Keeping this in mind, coupled with the fact that our immigrant population is not going away, Rep. Alonzo co-authored legislation that allows hospitals to use local funds however they choose, including use of services for programs to administer health care regardless of status of an individual. There is no doubt that this will allow hospitals to save money in the long run by providing preventative care up front to those who need it most, rather than have to spend millions later for emergency care.

In 2003, Rep. Alonzo was equally successful in passing other key pieces of legislation affecting the lives of all average Texans in other areas as well. He sponsored a bill that protects peace officers ability to carry concealed weapons and another creating a study to improve the collection of court costs and fees in Texas. He passed legislation that requires the Texas Board of Medical Examiners (TBME) to review a national clearinghouse of disciplinary actions taken against physicians when investigating doctors. In addition, he co-authored legislation to limit ad valorem homestead taxes for the elderly and disabled, to set up a program to reimburse teachers for personal funds expended on classroom supplies, and to allow for cities to donate surplus fire-fighting equipment to benefit other local volunteer fire departments that otherwise could not afford such costs.

During the 2005 Session, Rep. Alonzo was equally successful with a number of amendments to legislation that added two new criminal district courts to Dallas County to alleviate the backlog of cases; legislation to preserve the licensing requirements for Spanish interpreters in judicial proceedings; adding Spanish domestic education classes in cases involving family law, child support, and other court-related matters; the offering of bilingual courses for certain family law suits affecting the parent-child relationship, protective orders, and collaborative law; a measure requiring a 48-hour waiver or advance notice to the defendant or his counsel prior to the preparation of the presentence report or sentence, unless it is waived by the defendant; bilingual English-Spanish notices to be made available to all voters when an individual is using an affidavit to vote in lieu of a voter registration certificate; an important measure that calls for an alternate oral examination for applicants who because of extreme circumstances are unable to take the traffic law and highway sign part of the driver's license examination; and finally, a measure that broadens the use of the economic development sales tax that will address many of dilapidated and abandoned buildings and other structures that exist in many communities.

Furthermore, during the 2007 Session, Rep. Alonzo succeeded in passing a number of successful measures. Among them was one to help parole officers that work in our state's criminal justice system to receive a much-needed and well-deserved salary package for all the hard work they undertake to guard our jails and prisons every day. Another one would require all local and county health authorities to report weekly to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) all cases of diagnosed HIV/AIDS infections cases. Another important amendment measure in 2007 by Rep. Alonzo provides a provision which asks defendants in court to make a specified donation to a nonprofit food bank or food pantry in the community in which the defendant resides, as part of court-ordered community service. When it comes to eminent domain, another Alonzo amendment asks that when school districts get ready to conduct feasibility studies that they give serious consideration to Historically Underutilized Businesses or HUBs, as mandated by state law. This would require a school district to conduct a feasibility study prior to the condemnation of property in an attempt to ensure that the district is condemning only that property that they need and will use. Also during the 2007 session, Rep. Alonzo offered an important DNA measure to HB 8 when it comes to the toughening of penalties for sexual predators who target children. To help our proud military men and women and other veterans, Rep. Alonzo offered measures (to HB 3426) which would encourage the documentation of ethnic diversity and contributions made by all our service men and women that serve in the various wars and combat, including those serving in Afghanistan or Iraq. Additionally, Rep. Alonzo added a measure asking the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to conduct a study on all male and female veterans who return from the war in Afghanistan or Iraq and to determine what services are necessary to assist those veterans in their return from the war. To assist all Texas consumers better understand the importance of proper insurance coverage for their vehicles, an important measure by Alonzo asks the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) to establish an outreach program which would require the state to inform Texas citizens - in both English and Spanish - about all the requirements and provisions of the law mandating financial responsibility for their motor vehicle liability insurance coverage. Another important Alonzo measure includes a diversity measure to HCR 159 asking that the proposed Select Commission on

Higher Education (SCHE) include representatives that reflect the demographic diversity of the state. Another important HUB measure by Alonzo in 2007 involving the Statewide Cancer Institute and the issuance of bonds was included in the final version of HCR 90 to ensure the representation of minority-owned and Texas-based businesses in the study of scientific research of all forms of cancer in Texas. A similar HUB measure by the Dallas lawmaker was added to the State Bond Review Board. Additionally, he supported legislation to encourage more minorities into our engineering field, pre-paid incentives for students to attend college, curbing crimes related to burglary of vehicles, equalizing salary funding for visiting court judges, the use of court raining funds for law students working with indigent clients.

The 2009 session was equally significant for Rep. Alonzo as he passed legislation that will offer excused absences for students who have to leave school to go take their citizenship examinations or for autism testing purposes. He passed a measure that enhances the reliability of the TexasSure financial responsibility insurance program. Another measure sets up the North Oak Cliff Municipal Management District to enhance economic development in southwest Dallas. Yet another measure that Alonzo highly supported provides funding for more tier-one universities in Texas. He supported other measures to assist journalists from the whistleblower act; assistance for peace officers who have to carry concealed weapons into certain public places; providing adequate health insurance coverage for certain prosthetic devices, orthotic devices, and related services to certain disadvantaged Texans; cutting down on human trafficking; premium discounts for citizens who participate in the Texas Health Insurance Risk Pool; and enhancing servicers for the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) and other regional transportation systems in the DFW/North Texas region.

In January 2008, Rep. Alonzo was honored by the Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC) with their "**2008 Champion of Higher Education Award**," for his exemplary advocacy work on behalf of higher education issues in Texas, particularly the Latino population, students and faculty alike, and in February 2008, he was honored with the **TACHE Meritorious Service Award** presented by the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education during their 33rd Annual State Convention. During 2009, Rep. Alonzo received the "Legislator of the Year" award from **The Justices of the Peace & Constables Association of Texas**, the "Exceptional Leadership" award from the **Peruvian American National Council**, and a "Perfect 100% Honor," from **Environment Texas** for his support of environmental issues in Texas. He also received a "Perfect 100% Honor," Award on the Conservation Scoreboard from the Texas League of Conservation Voters (TLCV).

In addition to his legislative duties, civic affairs, and active political involvement in the community, Rep. Alonzo is an attorney by profession. A former migrant worker born and raised in Crystal City, Texas, in a family of 11 siblings, he graduated from Crystal City High School where he also served as his Student Body President and worked summers and after school in the town's legal aid center. In 1973, he sat on the Crystal City Independent School District Board of Trustees as a Student Representative. This active involvement as a young teen was the first sign that later encouraged him to pursue a career as an attorney. At the encouragement of his high school teachers, he left the small south Texas town to pursue an undergraduate degree at UT-Austin on an academic scholarship graduating with a B.A. degree in 1980. From there, he continued his law studies at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in Houston where he obtained his Doctor of Jurisprudence in 1984. Rep. Alonzo is currently a self-practitioner and small business owner in Dallas where he specializes in criminal law. In addition to his law practice, he is actively involved in a number of community affairs in the Dallas metroplex area. A former Board Member of both the Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Dallas Area Rapid Transit Authority (DART), he has also served as an active Board Member of Hispanic PAC/USA in Washington, D.C. and the Mexican American Bar Association. He is also an active member of the Democratic Party, having served in a number of significant capacities at the local, state, and national levels, including

precinct chair several times as well as on the Executive Committee at both the state and national party levels. Rep. Alonzo has served as both state and national delegate to a number of party conventions as well. He has been a key organizer and coordinator for a number of notable local, state and national/congressional campaigns, including both State Chair and National Co-Chair of the "Adelante Con Clinton" Campaign, organized to maximize the Latino vote in the country. as well as the Southwest Voter Registration & Education Project (SWVREP). Additionally, Rep. Alonzo is a former Assistant Texas Attorney General, Legislative Aide in the Texas Senate, state employee with the Texas Department of Human Resources, paralegal for both the Texas Rural Legal Aid Clinic and the Oficina de la Gente Legal Aid Clinic, which provide free pro bono legal services to low-income families.

Rep. Alonzo is married to the former Sylvana Avila, also of Crystal City. They have three children: Roberto, Jr.; Maria Xiomara; and, Jose Maria Emeterio.

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